SECTION 2

From the Inside Out: How Schools Develop Internal Accountability

Chartering puts schools in a set of interdependent relationships quite different from those that apply either to conventional public or to private schools. Unlike conventional public schools, charters must attract families and teachers who can choose other schools, and they must enter directly into relationships with private organizations that provide financial support, advice, and services. Unlike private schools, they must negotiate their charters with public authorizing agencies, convince the same agencies that they are fulfilling their charters, and build a relationship of trust and confidence in anticipation of charter renewal.

In theory, these interdependencies should define charter schools' accountability relationships. This section discusses what we found about how charter schools manage key relationships and how they balance the needs and demands of the different parties to which they are accountable.[1] It also reviews what we have learned about charter schools' *internal accountability* (i.e., the ways the school leadership and staff work together on a day-to-day basis to ensure that the school works for students and is therefore able to keep its promises to others). Overall, we found that:

- Though many charter schools start without strong internal accountability mechanisms, the majority of schools in our case studies are rapidly developing the capacity to ensure that instruction is provided as promised and that students learn.
- Charter schools' external accountability—their need to maintain relationships of trust and confidence with parents and teachers, as well as government, motivates the intense internal collaboration that leads to internal accountability.

Subsequent sections will expand these points.

Internal Accountability

Internal accountability is necessary for an organization to use all its human and financial resources efficiently toward a goal. It is especially important for organizations like schools, where people play specialized roles and the product (student learning) is not created by one person acting alone but by many people acting in combination.

[1] This section extends a line of analysis initiated by Priscilla Wohlstetter and colleagues. See Wohlstetter, Priscilla and Noelle C. Griffin, *First Lessons: Charter Schools as Learning Communities*, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1997.

Newmann introduced the idea of "internal accountability" to education.[2] In a school, internal accountability is the set of processes whereby teachers apply shared expectations to their own work and to that of their colleagues.

The idea of internal accountability flies in the face of a common belief about schools—that they are naturally "loosely coupled." As Weick has observed, schools (and other professional organizations like law firms and medical clinics) rely heavily on the expert judgement of individuals who practice, at least much of the time, on their own.[3] Dependency on individual expertise means that such organizations cannot be rigidly programmed and efforts to completely standardize practice are counter productive.

Notwithstanding Weick's observation, however, many effective professional organizations incorporate strong ideas about common mission, corporate identity, complementary roles, and collaboration. Lawyers in a firm recognize that their colleagues' performance affects their own reputations and the firm's access to future business. Doctors in a clinic recognize the need to coordinate the treatment they give a particular patient and to create internal consensus on how particular symptoms are best diagnosed and treated. Partners in major accounting firms recognize the need to create products that reinforce a corporate identity and create common standards for selecting and training new professionals.

In education, "loose coupling" has been taken as a norm that justifies treating a school as simply the sum of its parts and idealizes individual autonomy. However, that norm is now strongly challenged. Newmann and his associates;[4] Bryk and Lee;[5] Hill, Foster, and Gendler;[6] and others have shown that highly productive schools have attributes that reduce the looseness of coupling among individuals' efforts. They show that highly effective schools are based on strong agreement on mission (who is to benefit from the school's efforts and in what way), methods of instruction, norms for coordinating work across subject matters and grade levels, criteria for selecting and socializing teachers, and methods for assessing overall performance.

In theory, the charter school movement challenges loose coupling in education. By making schools' existence dependent on their ability to demonstrate performance, chartering can reward effective combined action and punish unproductive fragmentation.

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[2] Newmann, Fred M., Bruce M. King, and Mark Rigdon, Accountability and School Performance, Implications from Restructuring Schools, *Harvard Education Review*, v67 n1 p41–74, Spring 1997.
[3] Weick, Karl E., Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, v21 n1, 1–19, March 1976.
[4] Newmann, Fred M. et al., *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1996. See also Newmann, Fred and Gary Wehlage, *Successful School Restructuring: A Report to the Public and Educators by the Center on Organizational Restructuring of Schools*. Madison, WI, 1995.
[5] Bryk, Anthony S., and Valerie E. Lee et al., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993.
[6] Hill, Paul T., Gail E. Foster, and Tamar Gendler, High Schools With Character, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 1990.

Internal vs External Accountability Relationships

The distinction between external and internal accountability is both extremely important and slippery. A charter school's external accountability relationships are with entities that provide resources that it needs in order to exist: authorizers (which grant status as a publicly-funded school); families (which choose to enroll students, who bring public funds); teachers (whose choices determine whether the school can deliver its instructional program); potential governing board members (who can provide expertise and political support for the school); and donors (who must fill any gap between a school's public funding and its operating costs). A school's internal accountability relationships are limited to the people who have decided to work in or for the school, teaching and serving students or supporting the instructional program.

The distinction becomes slippery because some entities are both external and internal. Parents and teachers, for example, are free to choose whether to join the school or not. In that sense, they (and for that matter all parents and teachers in a locality who might someday choose or avoid the school) help constitute the school's external accountability.[7] However, once a teacher or parent chooses a school, and agrees to play a role in teaching or supporting students, he or she joins in the school's internal accountability relationships. In the sense that parents and teachers can always choose whether to stay or go, they are always elements of a school's external accountability. In the sense that they contribute to the school's instructional program and services to students, parents and teachers are entangled in the school's internal accountability.

All schools have some internal accountability. Schools where adults are free "to do their own thing" with little attention to the consequences for students have very little internal accountability. Schools that make sure all adults work together effectively on behalf of student learning have a great deal of accountability. As we will show, charter schools are impelled by performance pressure to develop internal accountability.

How and Why Charter Schools Develop Internal Accountability

In our study of charter schools, we set out to observe internal accountability and to judge whether charter schools were in fact more integrated, collaborative, and internally demanding than the "loose coupling" norm would suggest. We conducted a survey of 60 authorizing

[7] The same could be said of governing board members, who can decide whether or not to donate their time and support.

agencies in the 6 study states, drew data from a national charter school study conducted by RPP,[8] and conducted case studies of 17 charter schools in the study states. The data in this section are drawn primarily from the latter two sources. The results of the schools survey, reported in the charts and graphs below, are nationally representative. Our case study sample includes a good cross-section of charter schools; it is unbiased but too small to be considered nationally representative. However, it allows us to look deeply into individual schools to understand how they organize themselves and process demands from their many constituencies.

In the case study schools a pattern of development is apparent. Boards, teachers, administrators, and parents pass through periods of turbulence to develop shared expectations about goals and measures of overall performance. In the course of about 3 years, most schools regularize internal relationships and establish divisions of labor and bases on which individuals hold one another accountable.

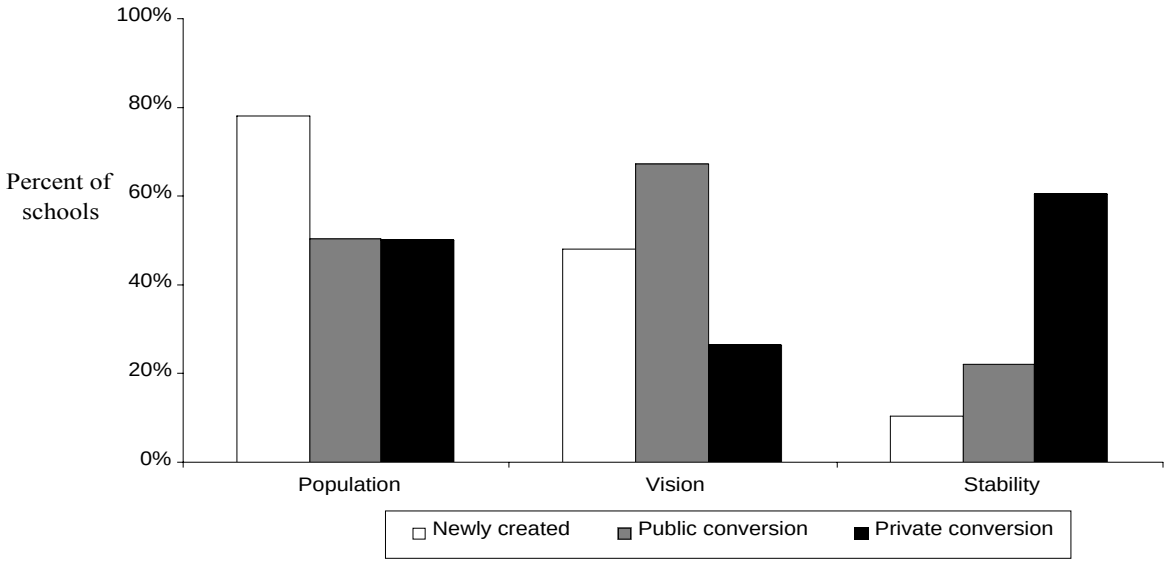
Charter schools are founded to pursue many different goals. Figure 2.1 drawn from our analysis of RPP's national charter school survey, shows that most charter schools are founded for one of three reasons: to serve a particular population (e.g., low-income students in an area with few strong schools); to realize a particular vision about a good school (e.g., one based on student projects or driven by intense collaboration); or to stabilize an existing public or private school that might not survive unless it takes on charter status. Figure 2.1 also shows that new schools predominantly emphasize serving a particular population group, while converted public schools emphasize realizing an educational vision. Former private schools often become charter schools in order to stabilize and preserve a tradition that parents and staff value.[9]

In many cases, these generally stated goals are not enough to guide effective collaborative action.

[8] Berman et al, *op cit.* In order to reduce the burden of response on charter schools, our research team cooperated with an ongoing study of charter schools being conducted by RPP International under contract to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. In the 1997–98 school year, RPP was in the third year of a multiyear national study of charter schools, collecting data from all charter schools then in existence. We developed a number of questions about accountability approaches and practices, and these questions were incorporated into a larger survey being administered to all charter schools in existence in spring 1998. There were 373 charter schools in the universe of interest (i.e., charter schools in existence for at least one full academic year by spring 1998) and of these 294 (78.8 percent) responded. RPP gave our research team access to all 3 years of data on these schools, thus providing extensive information on the initial experiences and growth of the vast majority of the charter schools that have survived the challenges of new laws, new regulations, and a new way of delivering public education. The percentages in figure 2.1 do not add up to 100 percent because schools had the option to select more than one response.

[9] In their initial year of operation, charter schools were asked to express, in their own words, the reason why their school was founded. Factor analysis revealed three independent factors, as reflected in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1—New schools aim to serve a population; public conversion seek a vision; and private conversions pursue stability



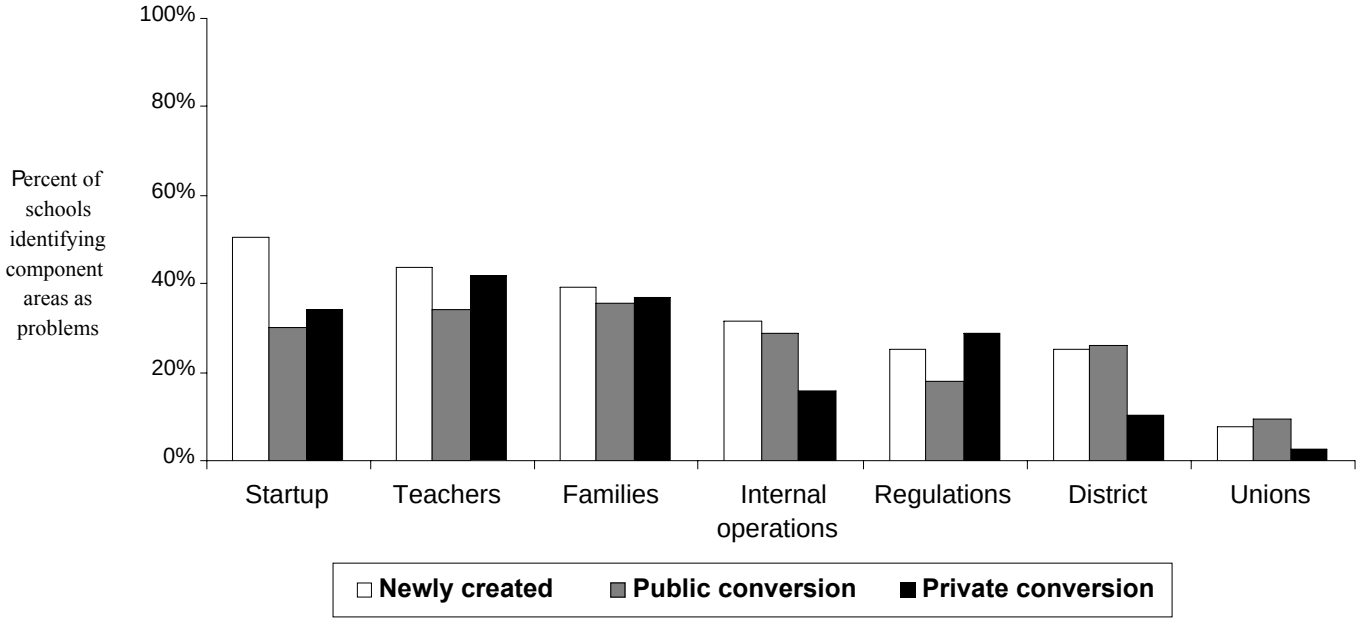
As figure 2.2 shows, new schools face difficult challenges preparing for opening day and creating a smooth-running organization.[10] New schools are also likely to have difficulty finding and preparing teachers, recruiting students, and creating stable relations with parents. Conversion public schools also report difficulties with parents, and they are somewhat more likely than new charter schools to have difficulties with their school districts, which must also learn what it means to oversee these schools as charters, not conventional public schools. Former private schools have fewer startup troubles than new charter schools, but many must expand their teaching staffs and student bodies, and thus encounter some difficulties with teachers and parents. Former private schools have little difficulty with internal operations, but they are relatively likely to report difficulties with public regulations, which most are encountering for the first time.

[10] Seven "problem" factors emerged from analysis of responses to 30 questions about "problems facing the charter school this year." The startup factor included responses to statements about inadequate financing, lack of planning time, locating facilities and community opposition; the teacher factor included hiring and turnover problems; the parents factor included lack of parental support, problems of communication with parents and trouble recruiting students; the internal operations factor included statements about communication within the school, staff conflict, internal processes within the school and administrator turnover; the regulations factor included items about accountability requirements as well as federal, local, and state regulations; the district factor covered district/central office resistance to the charter or conflict with these entities; and the unions factor included statements about collective bargaining agreements and union resistance.

Though most of our case study schools are rapidly developing mechanisms of internal accountability, few had them at the beginning. Some groups got charters on the basis of the resumes of individuals involved. However, the process of writing a charter application did not necessarily prepare the group to run the kind of school their proposal envisioned. The visionaries and rhetoricians who started some schools could write proposals and gather groups of enthusiastic individuals, but could not lead or manage an organization on a day-to-day basis.

External demands create pressures that drive a charter school's governing board, administration, and faculty toward united effort. Members of the groups that founded schools were often surprised at one another's actions and were troubled when new teachers just didn't seem to "get it." Some school founders became disillusioned about how poorly others understood their vision, and some groups of teachers concluded that school heads were causing a great deal of confusion. School leaders also found that parents who came to the school with unspoken expectations that the school had neither anticipated nor discouraged, quickly became unhappy customers. How schools respond to these initial confusions and disappointments determines whether they will build healthy internal accountability or never get there at all.

Figure 2.2—New schools face more start-up problems; private conversions face ne regulations; and public conversions face the same old problems



Pressures that Create Internal Accountability

With respect to the internal accountability of the schools we studied, not all schools started at the same place. Schools run by brand-new groups had more trouble than schools sponsored by established organizations, especially those that had prior experience running schools or offering instructional programs. Public schools that sought charter status brought with them many of the centrifugal tendencies they may have sought to remedy. Private schools that applied for charters had already faced the need for an integrating philosophy and many were able to avoid the startup angst they had long since weathered. Groups formed on little basis other than antipathy to the conventional public school system, or that shared few ideas about instruction other than a belief in teacher autonomy, experienced great difficulty. So did schools that formed on the basis of high-sounding principles (e.g., inclusiveness or creativity) independent of plans of action.

These problems are common to all new schools, charter or not. Chartering naturally creates three forms of pressures that favor schools with strong internal accountability and creates trouble for those that cannot develop effective internal collaboration. First, parents choose a charter school because they think it is set up to educate their children in ways they find legitimate, and though few parents pull their children out of charter schools, far more press on the schools to keep their promises. Second, when new teachers and administrators accept a position at a charter school, they do so on the basis of some understanding of goals and conditions of professional work. They too have strong incentives to take action when the school is not working as promised. Third, responsible authorizing agencies demand to know whether schools are operating as promised and producing positive student results. Though, as the following section shows, some authorizers do not take their responsibilities very seriously, some do. Those authorizers that make a serious monitoring effort can readily tell when a school is floundering. In general, schools that do not present and fulfill clear promises to parents about climate and instructional program, that do not present themselves clearly to potential staff and live by their promises, or that look shaky to their authorizers, are in for serious problems.

Chartering not only encourages schools to develop internal accountability, but usually enables internal accountability by giving schools control of staffing decisions, thus allowing them to hire people who will "fit" within a coherent conception of the school. It also enables accountability by giving schools control of funds, which allows them to buy forms of advice and assistance that help professionals converge on a vision of the school's mission and approach to instruction.

Charter schools face stronger pressures toward internal accountability than do conventional public schools. Charter schools' relations with authorizers, parents, and potential teachers make it clear that they are enterprises whose value must be apparent to others who have alternatives. Though good public relations can help schools meet these challenges, the experience of our case study schools shows that there is no substitute for clarity, coherency, and performance. Under pressures from their constituencies, charter schools flourish if they define themselves clearly enough to support earnest and purposive collaboration among faculty, staff, and parents.

For a school facing real performance pressures, it is not enough to follow all the rules, or to have high goals absent clear methods, or to be committed to using particular methods absent the capacity to put them into practice.

In the newly created charter schools we visited, a pattern of development is apparent. Boards, staffs, and parents pass through periods of turbulence to develop shared expectations about goals and measures of overall performance. In the course of about 3 years, most schools regularize internal relationships and establish divisions of labor and the basis on which individuals hold one another accountable.[11] Charter schools that survive initial confusions about goals and roles usually develop into organizations very unlike conventional public schools: they are clearer, simpler, less conflict-ridden, and more focused on instruction

In his seminal article on schools' internal accountability, Newmann concluded that external accountability—the demands and expectations of district school boards and other external constituencies—can be incompatible with internal accountability.[12] That might be the case for conventional public schools that have their goals and modes of operation mandated from on high, and are judged on the basis of compliance. But it is not the case with charter schools. For them, external accountability, can motivate internal accountability.

Circumstances that Work Against the Development of Internal Accountability

A relatively small minority of new charter schools—one in five of those we visited—have been very slow to develop internal accountability. Some schools might never overcome the expectation that someone on the outside (e.g., a school board or district central office) will micromanage and change the rules of the game at will.

Other schools never truly encounter the pressures from parents, teachers, board, or authorizing agency that lead to internal accountability. In particular, conversion schools (conventional public schools that, in some states, can choose to adopt charter status) often have great difficulty breaking out of the mold in which they were first made. Because they already have established teaching staffs, school buildings, and neighborhood attendance patterns, many conversion schools do not become accountable to parents and teachers in all the ways that new charters do. Most remain accountable only to the local school board and do not expect their performance to be any more closely monitored after chartering than before. As a result, many conversion schools operate, are staffed, and feel like district-run magnet or theme schools, not like new charters.

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[11] For more in-depth discussion of the life cycles of charter schools, see Korash, Susan J., *Charter Schools as Educational Reform: A Case Study of the Creation of Three Colorado Charter Schools*, a dissertation presented to the faculty of the College of Education, University of Houston, August, 1998. See also Finn, Chester, Bruno Manno, Louann Bierlein, and Gregg Vanourek, *The Birth Pains and Life Cycles of Charter Schools*, Hudson Institute Charter Schools in Action Project, August, 1997.

[12] Newmann et al., 1997, *op. cit.*

These findings from our case studies are reinforced by the national survey data. As figure 2.3 shows, public conversion schools are less likely to report having control of their budgets and what they buy, how they pursue their educational vision through selecting curriculum and hiring teachers, and how they operate and use time.

There are exceptions among conversion charters; the staff at one Los Angeles charter school insisted on becoming a school of choice and taking control of the entire per-pupil funding available in the Los Angeles Public Schools. This created new bases of accountability and new opportunities for change. School head Yvonne Chan, previously a maverick principal within the public school system, also took care to demonstrate that the school had taken advantage of chartering to change instruction, staffing, relations with parents, and use of funds.

The Vaughn charter school is surely not the only "conversion" school that now looks more like a new charter than a conventional public school. But many conversion schools regard chartering as an opportunity only for a few marginal changes and take care not to "rock the boat," either by challenging district control or by differentiating themselves sharply from other conventional public schools. One conversion middle school in California lost control of its size, and therefore its instructional program, as district decisions forced it to grow from 800 students to 1,500 students. The district needed to find places for a growing student population and did not want to create new schools. The school, as a district-sponsored conversion, felt as though it had no choice but to accept them.

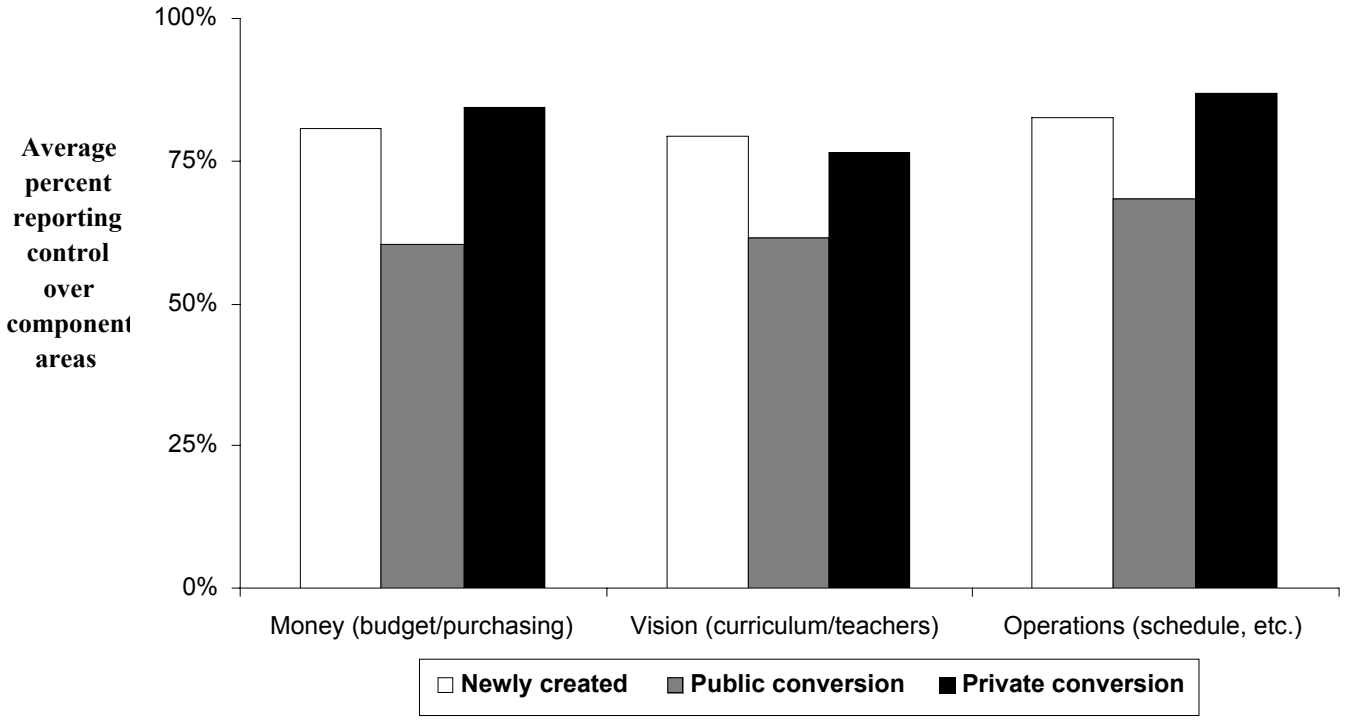
At some conversion schools, parents, and even sometimes school staff, are not aware of how charter status makes the school different. Administrators at one school we visited said they were going to start a concerted effort to let parents know how their school was different and why it would be important to remain a charter. They realized these parents were otherwise not going to be strong allies if the school's charter status ever came under question.

But while conversion schools can have some difficulty developing internal accountability, they also have some advantages. Schools that convert to charter status avoid some of the startup crises that afflict new "from scratch" charter schools. As one principal of a conversion school explained, she saw value in the close ties to the school district: district support allowed the staff to concentrate on instructional improvement and avoid the facilities and finance issues that so often plague new schools.

Independent or Dependent? An Important Dimension

All charter schools, both newly created and conversion, must deal with the question of how much autonomy they have from their authorizer. State laws vary in how much freedom schools will have over curricular, staffing, and financial decisions. State laws also differ on whether the charter school is considered a separate legal entity or whether it is legally an arm of the district. Schools that are considered a separate legal entity or have a high degree of freedom from their authorizer can be thought of as "independent" charter schools. Those that are legally just another district school or are given little autonomy from union contract provisions and district rules and regulations can be thought of as "dependent" charter schools.

Figure 2.3—Converted public schools are least likely to report they have contr over critical resources/decisions



The national survey data are not broken down into these categories, but our case studies make clear that this level of autonomy is at least as important as the distinction we draw in our charts between conversion and newly created schools (although the majority of dependent schools are conversion schools). Although independent, "new start" charter schools generally experience high initial levels of startup challenges, dependent charter schools seem to be more likely to experience long-term interference from their authorizers; run into trouble attracting staff whose instructional philosophies fit the mission of the schools; experience internal governance problems; and establish a clear understanding with parents about how the school is different from traditional public schools. In other words, schools with little freedom from a district often face grave challenges *maintaining* internal accountability. In one such school we visited in Georgia, the principal decided to work at another school in a different district after district personnel threatened to assign him to a different school. The school's governing board had no assurance that the new principal assigned to the school would share the school's instructional philosophy.

Independent conversion schools, on the other hand, have all the advantages of a conversion school (i.e., a history of running an instructional program, access to a building, etc.) without exposure to shifting staff assignment policies and district mandates that can interfere

with the school's efforts to create or maintain itself as a cohesive organization.[13] A school we visited in Georgia that operates with a broad waiver from state laws and a high degree of autonomy from the district explained that being a conversion school was a distinct advantage in developing a strong academic improvement plan. As the principal put it, "While brand new schools were dealing with contractors and building inspectors during the startup years, we got to focus on academics."

How School Governing Boards Promote Internal Accountability

School-level governing boards can play important roles in internal accountability. Most new charter schools have had to form internal governing boards, similar to those that run independent schools. In most states these boards are the legal persons responsible for the school.[14] They also officially undertake financial obligations for the school and are the employers of teachers and administrators. Creating these new boards, which are in effect the official internal oversight mechanisms for the schools, and establishing a productive division of labor between board and staff, has proven extremely challenging, but it is also an effective model when it works well.

As figure 2.4 shows, principals in the two kinds of schools that constitute the vast majority of charter schools—new schools and schools converted from conventional public school status—regard their governing boards as one of the primary groups to whom they are most accountable.

There is obviously not one "right" role for a charter school's governing board. But as we learned from our case studies, clear divisions of labor between board and management are crucial. Different boards err on different sides of the line between board micromanagement and a total lack of mission-management and constructive oversight.

Unlike the local site councils required by site-based management programs, most governing boards include, but are not dominated by current parents and teachers. Though they often include school founders who no longer work in the school, most boards are populated by experts or persons of influence in areas that are important to the school. The board of one Michigan charter school we visited included a lawyer, an insurance agency president, the head of a community bank, a friendly member of the city council, the head of a youth service agency, a respected public school principal, and a parent of a child who had graduated from the school.

Boards composed of business people or long-term supporters of the school are inclined to act like business boards; they counsel management on long-term strategy, recruit new school heads, and intervene at times of crisis. However, many boards do not start out with such a

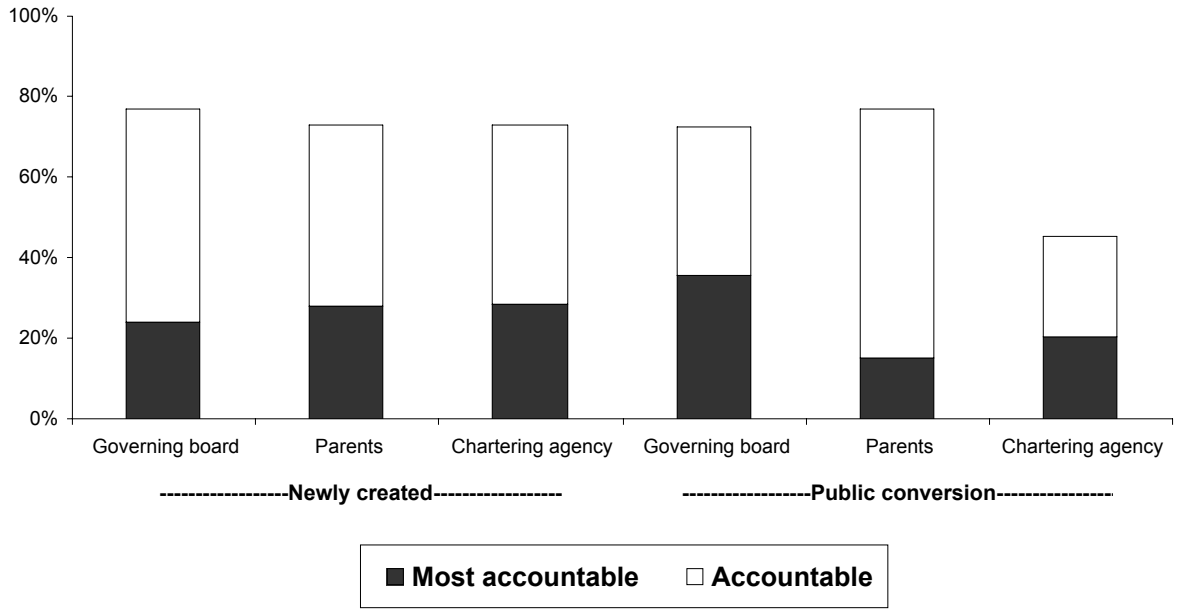
[13] Another study that found greater flexibility increased internal accountability was conducted in Los Angeles, CA, by WestEd. See findings from LAUSD Charter School Evaluation's Cross-Site Report, *The Findings and Implications of Increased Flexibility and Accountability: An Evaluation of Charter Schools in Los Angeles Unified School District*, 1998.

[14] In states such as Arizona, that do not require schools to be governed by nonprofit boards, more research is needed to determine the effect on accountability relationships.

disciplined vision of their own role. Boards composed of current parents and teachers often have great difficulty distinguishing their roles from those of management. We heard many stories of parent-teacher or teacher-principal conflicts leading to serious conflicts within such boards, and to rapid management turnover. At several schools we visited in Massachusetts, Arizona, and Colorado we learned of boards that often sidestepped the school principal or director and assigned duties directly to the school staff. In addition to clarifying roles, schools have also had to figure out ways to understand all parent needs in the school and not just the needs and interests of those parents who are on the board.

Establishing stable board-management relations has been especially difficult in cases when community organizations hire for-profit management companies like Edison or Sabis. In some cases, boards have entered these relationships expecting to control all important decisions, and contractors entered expecting to be left alone to manage the school. A small number of schools simply could not cope with these pressures and disbanded or fired their contractors and started over.

Figure 2.4—New and public conversion charters see themselves highly accountable to their governing boards, parents, and chartering agencies



On occasion, one large organization will obtain charters to operate several schools, and use one board to oversee them all. Many such schools have little contact with their boards, and consequently the boards know little about the schools. The schools then operate almost entirely

as staff-run enterprises. One for-profit company has schools in several far-flung states, and the board members, mostly located in Michigan, only meet a few times a year. The schools check in frequently with the management organization, but the schools outside Michigan have little contact with the company's board.

School leaders and teachers who come from public schools and other government agencies are not accustomed to working with individual-school governing boards. In their experience, boards are public representative bodies that have virtually sovereign powers and can regulate or intervene in school operations virtually at will. This view of a board's role is incompatible with a school's internal accountability, to which a board contributes by providing a clear and stable framework of goals and principles, within which staff members have real freedom of action. Like private sector boards, boards of well-defined charter schools oversee the school's basic identity and strategy, but leave day-to-day management to paid professionals. They refer complaints and personnel issues to managers for resolution, and when performance slips to unacceptable levels they look to hire new managers, to whom once again they can entrust day-to-day responsibility.[15]

Clarifying relationships between the individual school's governing board and its management is a key to the development of internal accountability. Some boards (e.g., the board of an Arizona school for at-risk youth) place great trust in their hired managers and offer only occasional advice. Others make key strategic decisions for the school. But all well-functioning boards learn that they must let managers run the school on a day-to-day basis, and that a board that loses confidence in management must find a better manager, not remedy the situation by constant intervention and second-guessing. A well-functioning governing board makes the principal and other staff members accountable to a group with nothing at stake other than the interests of the school. Charter school boards are, in the phrase introduced by the authors of *Reinventing Government*, built to steer, not row.[16]

Not all such boards steer competently, and authorizers we interviewed told of charter schools that foundered because board members did not understand the limits of their roles, or because board members and principals engaged in destructive feuds. These feuds can continue even after some of the individuals have moved on. In one case, the board members that founded a charter school in Massachusetts have resigned, but not disappeared. The current board has thus been dogged by a self-appointed watch group, which has organized teachers and parents to challenge board decisions and question whether the school was being true to its charter.

Contentious board staff relations have plagued many new schools, especially parent or teacher-founded charters. The founders of some charter schools have spent the last few years trying to sabotage the school they gave birth to because they feel it has grown into something that did not match their original vision.

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[15] See Carver, John. *Boards Make a Difference: A New Design For Leadership in Non-Profit and Public Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass non profit sector series, 1990. 54.

[16] Osborne, David, and Ted Gaebler, R*einventing Government,* New York, Basic Books, 1991.

Most, however, learned quickly from experience. Some authorizing agencies (e.g., Massachusetts, Chicago, and several Michigan universities) have seen the importance of board development and require training and mentoring for inexperienced boards.

What Charter Schools Measure and Monitor

Many, if not most new charter schools, start as loose organizations with few formal systems for accounting, process monitoring, or assessment. However, knowing that they must justify themselves to multiple audiences impels most schools toward organized performance assessment. Although charter schools are obligated to take part in state testing programs and to report student attendance figures, there is nothing that absolutely requires schools to assess those results for themselves, or to use the results as basis for improvement efforts. However, as figure 2.5 shows, the majority of schools monitor student achievement and attendance. Most test students more frequently than the once per year required by their charters.

Figure 2.5 also shows that new schools are slightly more likely to monitor student behavior and parent involvement than conversion public schools. This almost certainly reflects new schools' greater commitment to providing a motivating environment for a particular group of students and their need to attract and keep committed parents.

The data from converted private schools might provide a preview of future self-assessment practices in charter schools. Former private schools, which were independent organizations before becoming public charter schools, are more likely to use multiple performance measures in almost all areas than other charter schools. This is probably due to their greater prior development as instructional organizations and to lessons learned long ago about the need to monitor many areas of performance and factor the results into school decisionmaking.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the basic concept of internal accountability. The next chapter shows how charter schools learn to maintain their integrity as instructional organizations in the face of pressures from families, teachers, donors, and authorizing agencies.

Figure 2.5—Most charter schools monitor man performance measures more than once a year